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An Examination of *Camioneta* Van Operations
in the Texas-Mexico Border Region of Texas

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By

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Executive Summary

Camioneta vans are 15-passenger vans that operate essentially in the same manner as a motor coach carrier in that they are a carrier-for-hire, transporting individuals for a fee between predetermined points.

- The typical *camioneta* vehicle is a Dodge Ram or Ford Econoline van.
- Almost 90 percent of the vehicles surveyed displayed a company name on the vehicle.
- Almost 60 percent of the vans displayed a motor carrier or “MC” number.
- Over 40 percent of van drivers reported they had liability insurance, while 56 percent reported they had full coverage.
- Less than 25 percent of the drivers said they were aware of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs). Less than 20 percent had received a company briefing and/or training.
- Over 40 percent of passengers chose *camioneta* vans because the van operator provided door-to-door service.
- Vans averaged 8.1 people with an occupancy rate of 65 percent.
- Fares from the Rio Grande Valley to Houston or San Antonio average \$30 and \$45 to Dallas. Fares from Laredo to San Antonio are \$15 and \$30 to Dallas.
- In some areas, *camioneta* vans play a significant role in the smuggling of illegal aliens.

- Observation and survey results indicate potentially serious problems with *camioneta* van operations with regard to factors associated with high vehicle mileage and long trips.
- *Camioneta* vans operate as long haul carriers-for-hire and should be subject to safety regulations consistent with other operators engaged in that enterprise.
- Due to the informal structure of *camioneta* operations, traditional means of increasing awareness of safety regulations may not be successful.
- A proactive initiative on the “colonias model” is needed among *camioneta* van operators to increase awareness. This education period should be followed by a period of strict enforcement.

Objectives of the Research

The purpose of the study was to define the extent of border-area commercial van operations commonly referred to as *camionetas*, to determine the extent of safety problems associated with these operations and to recommend strategies for communicating and enforcing the regulations. Toward that end, this report:

1. Identifies the type of vehicles used as a part of the *camioneta* operations to include make, model, mileage, seating capacity, and owner and/or motor carrier;
2. Identifies where vehicles operate including the origin and destination, schedule, and route;
3. Identifies why passengers choose to use this mode of transportation versus the more conventional motor coach mode;
4. Determines use of identifying markings;

5. Identifies specific safety-related attributes of *camioneta* operations such as type of drivers license of the operator, insurance coverage, and the general condition of vehicle;
6. Offers recommendations for advertising the applicability of the safety regulations that impact the *camioneta* community to the users; and,
7. Recommends strategies for enforcing the FMCSRs that apply to *camioneta* operations.

It was also an objective of this report to collect safety data with regard to *camioneta* operations in Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico through interviews with law enforcement personnel and U.S. Customs officials. This proved unsuccessful as no agencies had data segregated specifically by *camioneta*. The problem in California, Arizona, and New Mexico is much the same as described by Texas Department of Public Safety Director Dudley Thomas when he noted in a letter for inclusion in FHWA Docket No. 99-5710 regarding *camionetas*, “There are no accident statistics available within our database from which the FHWA could extrapolate data to depict the actual problem small van carriers are creating on the highways.” In other words, while there is data that would indicate “vans” as a type of vehicle involved in an accident, there is no data available that would indicate the number such vans involved in accidents that were operating as *camionetas*.

With respect to 15-passenger vans in general, a recent report issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration entitled *The Rollover Propensity of Fifteen-Passenger Vans* states, “Analysis of crash databases and measurement of rollover propensity metrics indicate that 15-passenger vans might be more likely to roll over when fully loaded with occupants than when lightly loaded. For all occupant loadings, 15-passenger vans have an overall rollover rate comparable to that of all light trucks and vans (LTVs). Analysis considering the number of

occupants in the vehicle showed that 15-passenger vans with ten or more occupants had three times the rollover ratio than those with fewer than ten occupants.”

Methods and Locations of Surveying *Camioneta* Van Operators

As originally proposed, the survey was to be conducted at all ports of entry between Brownsville, Texas to El Paso, Texas including the border crossings at: Brownsville, Los Indios, Progreso, Hidalgo, Los Ebanos, Rio Grande City, Roma, Falcon Dam, Laredo, Columbia, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, Boquillas, Presidio, El Paso, Socorro, Fabens, and Ft. Hancock.

To begin the process of securing permission to administer the survey, the U.S. Customs Service at individual bridge crossings in Brownsville, Texas and Hidalgo, Texas were contacted. Permission to administer the survey was secured from Customs officials at those individual bridge crossings. That permission at the local level was subsequently rescinded for those particular bridge crossings and at others throughout the southern Texas zone by the Customs Service Zone Office in Laredo, Texas because it was felt by the Southern Zone Director and her General Counsel that the survey could not be conducted in a safe manner, that it would create liability issues for the Customs Service, that there was no appropriate and sufficient space to conduct the survey, and because, as civilians, the contractor had no authority to inspect/interview individuals on federal property. Permission to administer the survey was subsequently obtained from the U.S. Customs Service Northern Zone Director (El Paso to Laredo, but not including Laredo). At that point, permission had been secured to administer the survey from El Paso southeast to Laredo using Customs facilities, but not from Brownsville up to and including Laredo. (See Attachment 1 for sample letter sent to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officials.)

As a result of this inconsistency, the United States Border Patrol was contacted to determine the feasibility of conducting the survey at inland Border Patrol checkpoints. The rationale for this contact was that survey coverage would still be complete because *camioneta* vehicles would eventually pass through one of the Border Patrol checkpoints in route to their final destinations. Further, as was determined in visits to border crossings subsequent to preparation and submission of the original proposal, the point of departure for the vast majority of *camioneta* vans is on the U.S. side of the border. As a result, if the survey had been conducted only at international border crossings, most *camioneta* operations would have been missed by surveyors positioned in Customs facilities.

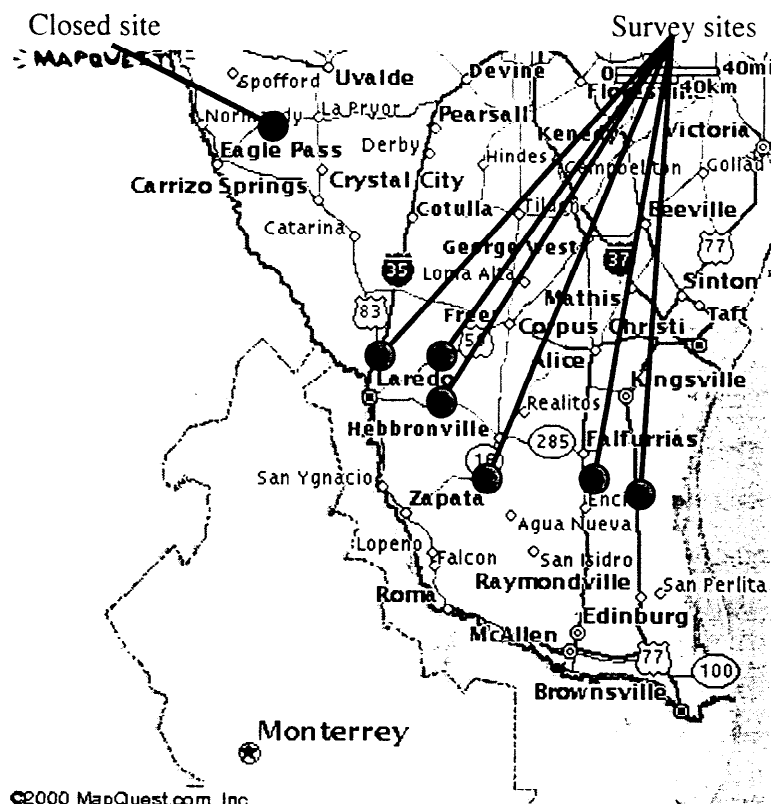
The U.S. Border Patrol in Texas is divided into five sectors—McAllen, Laredo, Del Rio, Marfa, and El Paso. The Border Patrol, with one exception, was extremely cooperative in facilitating the job of the surveyors. The Marfa sector of the Border Patrol was unwilling to allow surveyors to use Border Patrol facilities because they felt that conducting the survey at border checkpoints under their jurisdiction placed the surveyors at too great a risk. The Eagle Pass Border Patrol station (Del Rio sector) was unable to cooperate because the Texas Department of Transportation had closed the Border Patrol inspection station on Route 57 due to highway construction. The Del Rio sector in general, and more specifically, the Eagle Pass station was, however, very cooperative in providing information on the nature of *camioneta* operations in their sector, specifically as they relate to the significant smuggling operations that apparently take place.

In the final analysis, the decision was made to use U.S. Border Patrol facilities to administer the survey. While permission had been obtained from U.S. Customs officials in El Paso to use Custom facilities from El Paso southeast to Laredo for the survey, because permission had been denied to use Customs facilities from Laredo to Brownsville, it was felt this inconsistency was problematic from the standpoint of obtaining a consistent survey sample. In addition, as noted earlier,

the *camioneta* operations of primary interest, i.e., long-haul carriers-for-hire, and the vast majority of *camioneta* operators in general, would likely be missed by surveying border crossings only.

As originally proposed, surveyors were to be recruited with the assistance of the Center for Housing and Urban Development at Texas A&M University from their local contacts developed as a result of their research, community development, and social service activities in border colonias. However, when it was determined that the surveys could not be conducted at border crossing checkpoints, transportation for the surveyors to the inland Border Patrol checkpoints became an issue. As a result, the decision was made to hire and train temporary workers to administer the surveys, have them provide their own transportation as a condition of employment, and compensate them for travel time.

Survey Locations:



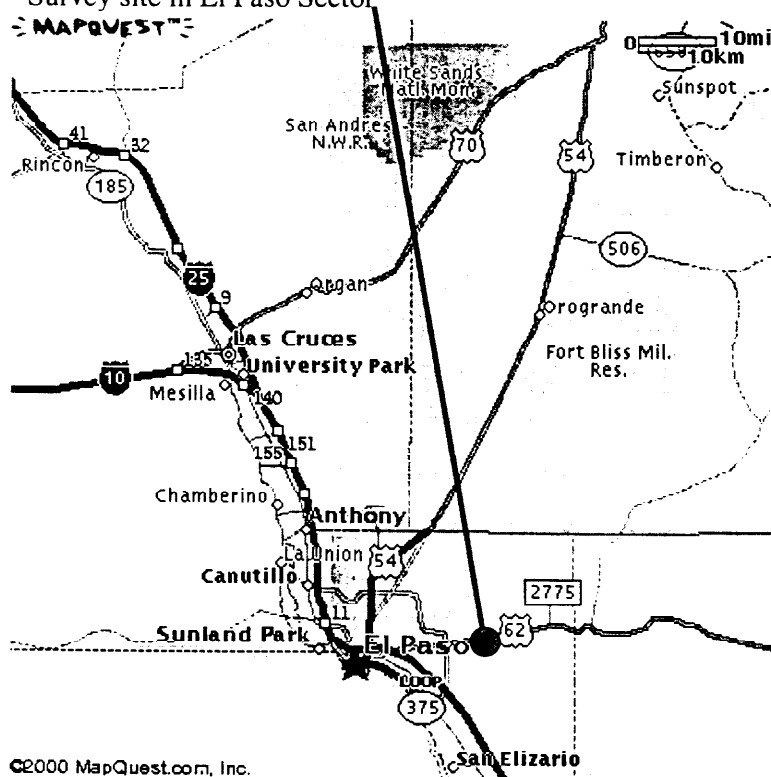
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would be administered were determined and a source for survey personnel was
selected, Survey site in El Paso Sector

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orientation session that included a discussion on the purpose of the research, familiarization with the survey instrument, procedures for completing the interviews, practice interviews, and a briefing on the Border Patrol's activities and how to implement a cooperative working arrangement.

As a result, surveys were ultimately conducted at U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints from Brownsville to Laredo (excluding the Eagle Pass and Marfa sectors) and in El Paso. It is felt that, even with the exclusion of the Eagle Pass and Marfa sectors, the survey administrators were able to capture the characteristics of *camioneta* operations and, with the additional anecdotal information provided by the Eagle Pass sector, a significant amount of information pertinent to the objective of the research project was obtained. (See Attachment 2 for locations where surveys were conducted.)

Survey Procedure

A total of 64 *camioneta* vans participated in the survey. The surveys were conducted on Thursdays and Fridays. Thursday was selected as a survey day to represent typical mid-week activity. Friday was selected as a survey day because it was originally suspected that *camioneta* activity would increase as the weekend approached. This subsequently proved to be only marginally true.

Since there is no known accurate count of the number of operators that could be classified as "*camionetas*," it is impossible to determine with any precision the percentage of the total population of *camioneta* vehicles that was surveyed. Based on the volume of traffic observed, however, it is possible to estimate that total weekly volume of *camioneta* vehicles crossing through U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints in Texas is approximately 400 to 750 per week. This estimate is based on the number of observed vehicles at those checkpoints where surveys were conducted and conversations with Border Patrol agents at both surveyed and non-surveyed stations. If this estimate is accurate, then the percentage of vehicles

surveyed would represent approximately 8.5 to 16.0 percent of the total weekly *camioneta* volume in Texas. Such a sample level is sufficient to produce a confidence interval of greater than 90 percent in a random sample.

However, the spatial distribution of the sample might appear to be problematic with respect to a random sample. This is the case because of the absence of any observations from the Marfa sector (due to the sector's refusal to participate) and the Del Rio sector (due to the closure of an inspection station). However, three additional factors seem to support the validity of the sample as being representative. First, the results are consistent between the surveyed stations and there is no *prima facie* evidence to indicate that the seven surveyed stations are different from those that were not surveyed. Second, Border Patrol agents who have experience in those areas that were not included in the survey concurred that the findings from the surveyed areas were consistent with their experience in those areas that were not surveyed. Third, personal observations of *camioneta* operations in those areas not surveyed seemed to indicate consistency with operations in those areas that were surveyed. The notable exception is the smuggling of illegal aliens via *camioneta* vans that seems to exist predominately in the Eagle Pass area. Those observations are discussed elsewhere in this report. The Eagle Pass situation notwithstanding, it is believed the survey included a representative and sufficient sample of the *camioneta* population and is sufficient to draw general conclusions about the population of *camionetas* as a whole.

From a procedural perspective, the surveys were conducted after the vehicle had been processed through the Border Patrol inspection. When a *camioneta* van was identified by the Border Patrol agent, the agent would then ask the van driver if he/she would agree to pull out of the way of normal traffic flow and participate in a voluntary study being sponsored by the Department of Public Safety and conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University. During the survey periods a total two van drivers who refused to participate.

Development of the Survey

The survey was designed to meet the project specifications outlined in the *Request for Proposal* issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety. Once the survey was developed, it was submitted and ultimately approved by the department as well as by personnel with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA).

Specifically, the survey was designed to identify:

- ◆ type of vehicle
- ◆ make, model, mileage
- ◆ seating capacity
- ◆ owner and/or motor carrier
- ◆ origin and destination of the vehicle
- ◆ schedule and route
- ◆ drivers license type of operator
- ◆ why passengers choose to use this mode of transportation versus the more conventional motor coach
- ◆ insurance coverage
- ◆ hours of operation
- ◆ general safety condition of vehicle.

A copy of the survey is included as Attachment 3.

Findings

Before discussion the results of the survey, it might be helpful to establish the general nature of *camioneta* van operations in Texas.

First, *camionetas* are 15-passenger vans that operate essentially in the same manner as a motor coach carrier in that they are a carrier-for-hire, transporting individuals for a fee between predetermined points. While schedules of *camioneta* vans tend to be somewhat more flexible, there are regular routes and regular posted days and times of departure. One substantial difference between traditional motor coach carriers and *camioneta* van operations is that most *camioneta* operators provide door-to-door service for passengers. All that is necessary to book a seat is to place a telephone call to the van operator and provide an address for pickup. On most occasions, the van will also deliver passengers to individual locations in the destination city. There are also *ad hoc* locations for van pick-up and delivery. In Laredo, for example, a service station on Interstate 35 served as a gathering point of departure between 12:30AM and 1:00AM. In Brownsville, a parking lot near the International Bridge served the same purpose. Based on conversations with Border Patrol agents and *camioneta* passengers, these *ad hoc* locations change from time to time.

Second, the location of the “depot” or the “bus station” for a particular *camioneta* van operator is also fairly consistent among operators. For the most part, whether the point of departure is Brownsville, Hidalgo, Laredo, El Paso, or points in between, the “depot” is within a few block radius of an international bridge crossing. A simple walking tour and close observation will yield information as to the number and location of van operators. Many of the passengers are individuals who cross the border an international bridge on foot and then board the *camioneta* van for the trip to points beyond.

Third, advertising of *camioneta* van operations is informal. Few van operators have telephone listings, fewer still advertise in the yellow page portion of the local telephone book or in local newspapers. That is, at least, the case on the Texas/Mexico border. Evidence indicates there is substantial advertising by *camioneta* operators in Spanish language newspapers in Houston. Those

operators, however, are not the subject of this report. In any event, it seems clear that word-of-mouth advertising and a generally less formal mode of operation as opposed to more traditional motor coach operations is the rule. However, as more than one Border Patrol agent indicated, “They’re easy to find if you know what you’re looking for.” (It is also interesting to note that on more than occasion, van operators showed a particular sensitivity to having their vans or “depot” locations photographed even when they were informed of the purpose of the photograph.)

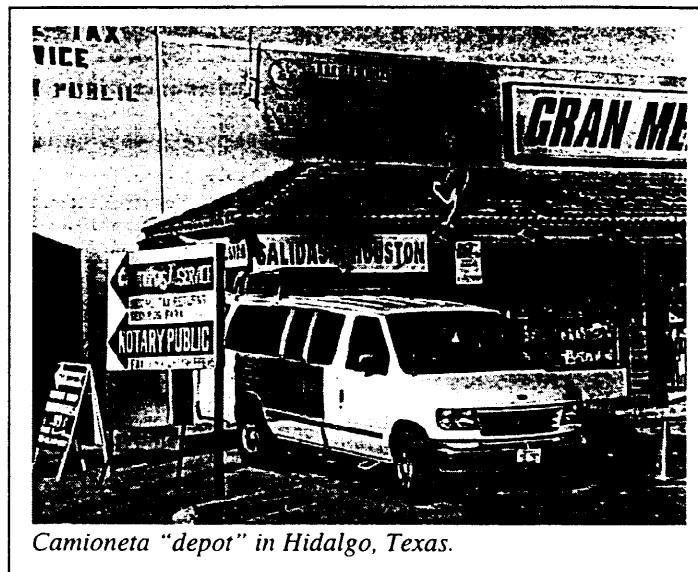
Results of the Survey

A total of 64 vans participated in the survey. A list of company names represented in the survey appears in Attachment 4. The findings that follow are a result of those surveys.

Observed Characteristics of Camioneta Vans

The typical *camioneta* vehicle is a Dodge Ram (64 percent) or Ford Econoline (36 percent) 15-passenger van. Model years ranged from 1990 to 1998. On average, van odometers indicated mileage of 229,825 miles. Among the vans surveyed, the mileage ranged from 38,000 to 545,641 miles.

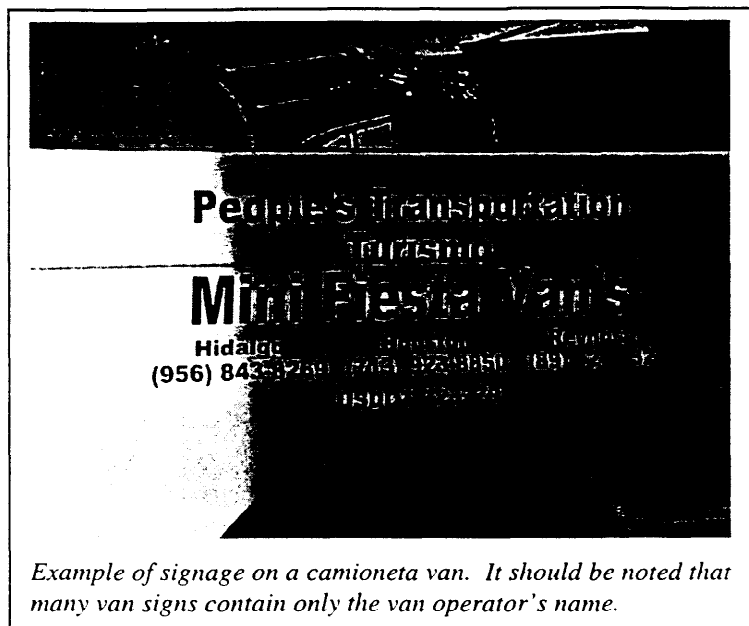
Surveyors were asked to visually inspect the vehicle and score the vehicle’s general condition on a scale of one to five with one representing “excellent” condition and five representing “poor” condition. The surveyors were asked to base their evaluation on the general physical appearance of the vehicle (dents, tire wear, broken windows, and the like) excluding such things as road grime and dirt. On average, the vans scored 2.7 out of a possible 5.0 points, or in other words, slightly lower than the 3.0 median number.



Surveyors also observed the markings on the vehicle with the following results: 88 percent of the vehicles displayed a company name on the vehicle; 35 percent of the vehicles had some form of vehicle identification marking such as a vehicle number; 65 percent of the observed vehicles had a telephone number on the van; and 59 percent of the vans displayed a motor carrier or "MC" number.

The drivers all responded that they had insurance with 44 percent reporting they had liability insurance, while 56 percent of drivers reported that they had full comprehensive-commercial insurance coverage.

Surveyors it should be noted, had no authority to ask the driver to produce proof of insurance coverage so the results for this question are based only on the response of the driver. It should also be noted that Border Patrol agents indicated that they often could not determine the validity of insurance coverage on a particular vehicle based solely on the paperwork carried by the driver. It was very difficult, some Border Patrol agents remarked, to determine whether the insurance card offered by the van driver as proof of coverage was actually proof that the particular van in question was covered or whether the insurance coverage pertained to another van in the company's fleet.



Observed Characteristics of Camioneta Drivers

Among the drivers surveyed, 72 percent reported possessing a Class C Texas Driver's License (non-commercial), 17 percent refused answer the question, and 11 percent reported possessing a Class B Texas Driver's License (commercial). As explanation, a Class C Driver's License allows the operator to drive passenger cars and vehicles including vans rated as 15-passenger and up to 23-passengers. There are both commercial and non-commercial Class C licenses. A Class B Driver's License allows the operator to drive busses with capacities in excess of 24 passengers. While there are both commercial and non-commercial Class B licenses, most are in the commercial category. (See Attachment 5.)

Only one of the 64 drivers interviewed reported having an accident within the last 12 months. None reported being involved in an accident within the last 12 months that involved injuries.

Again, as with the question regarding insurance coverage, surveyors had no authority to require the driver to produce a driver's license nor did they have any

means to check the accuracy of the driver's accident record claims. As a result, the reliability of these results cannot be determined.

Among drivers surveyed, 22 percent said they were aware of the FMCSRs while 17 percent reported they had received a company briefing and/or training regarding the regulations and 12 percent reported having received a written company policy or manual concerning the FMCSRs.

Observed Characteristics of Camioneta Passengers

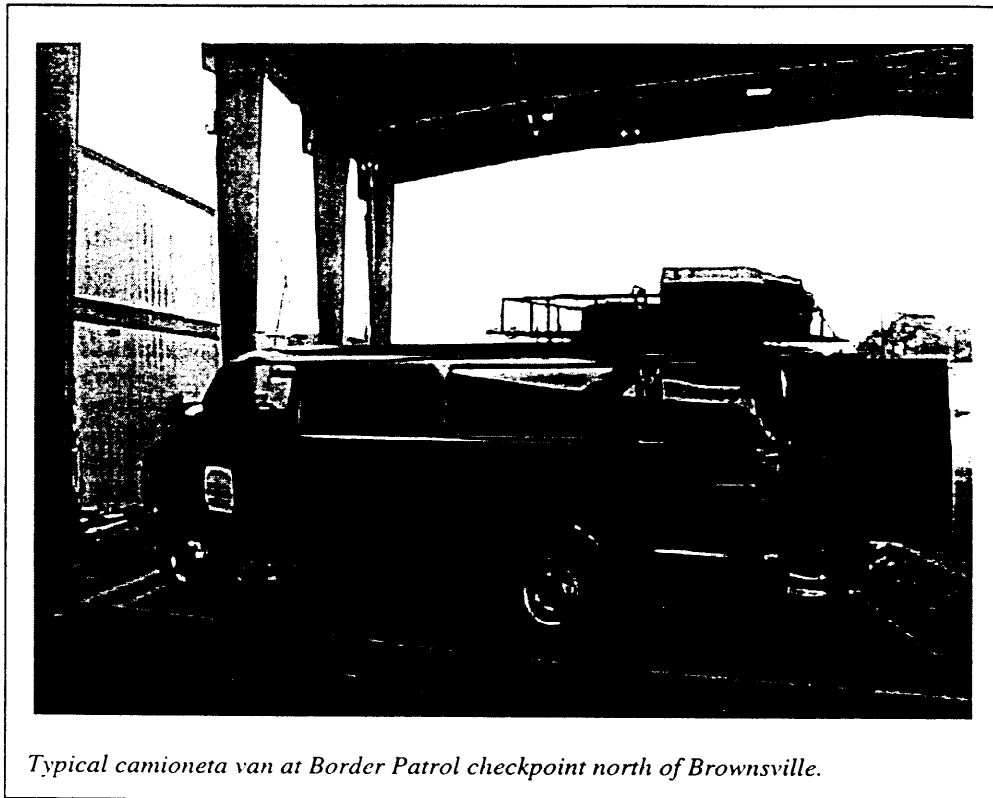
When asked to identify the reason or reasons passengers chose to ride a *camioneta* van as opposed to a more conventional motor coach for-hire carrier, 42 percent of respondents indicated that they chose *camionetas* because the van operator would pick them up at their place of residence and deliver them to their final destination – i.e., door-to-door service. Cost was mentioned as a determining factor by 25 percent of passengers while 24 percent identified frequency of service and 12 percent identified the van's route as being a deciding factor.

The observed persons-per-van average was 8.1 people representing an average van capacity of 65 percent.

Characteristics of Camioneta Routes and Pricing

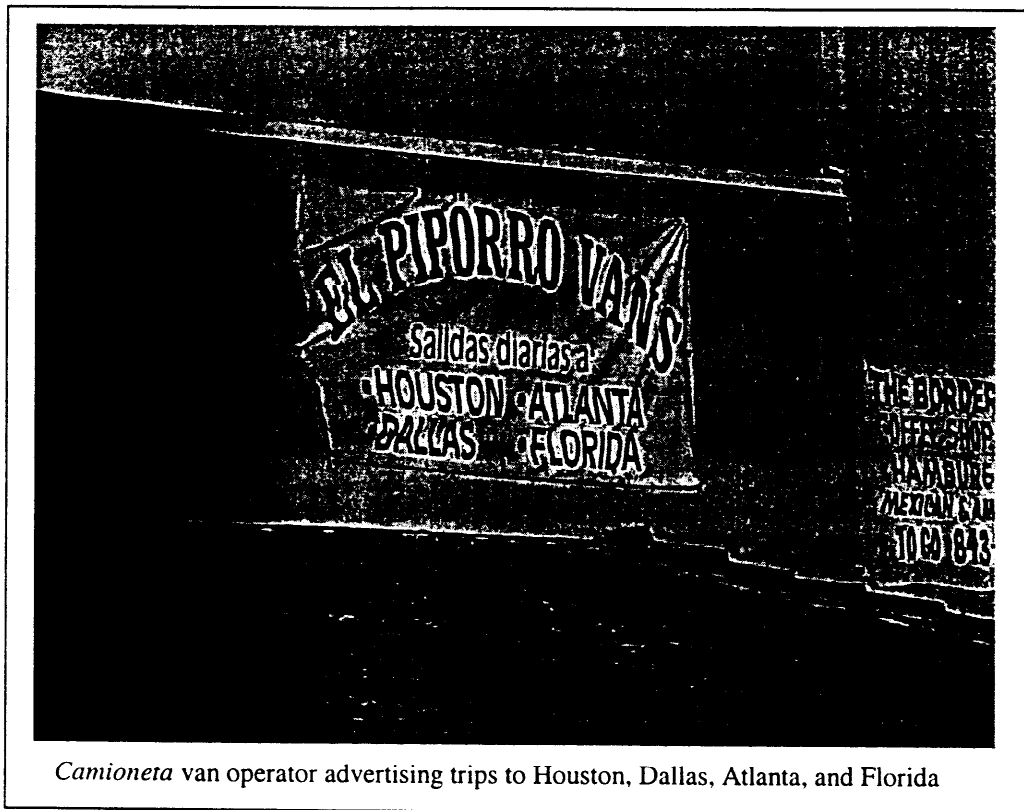
In general, *camioneta* routes originating in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (the Lower Rio Grande Valley traditionally refers to the Brownsville-Harlingen area) travel through Houston and to points as far east as Atlanta. *Camioneta* routes originating in the Upper Valley (McAllen-Hidalgo area) indicated a final destination of either Houston or San Antonio with suspected destinations east or north. Routes originating in Laredo and Eagle Pass reported a final destination of San Antonio with suspected routes north to Dallas, Kansas City, and Chicago. The one El Paso *camioneta* van indicated its final destination was San Antonio.

(Customs and Border Patrol agents report that the few *camioneta* vans operating out of El Paso go north into New Mexico.

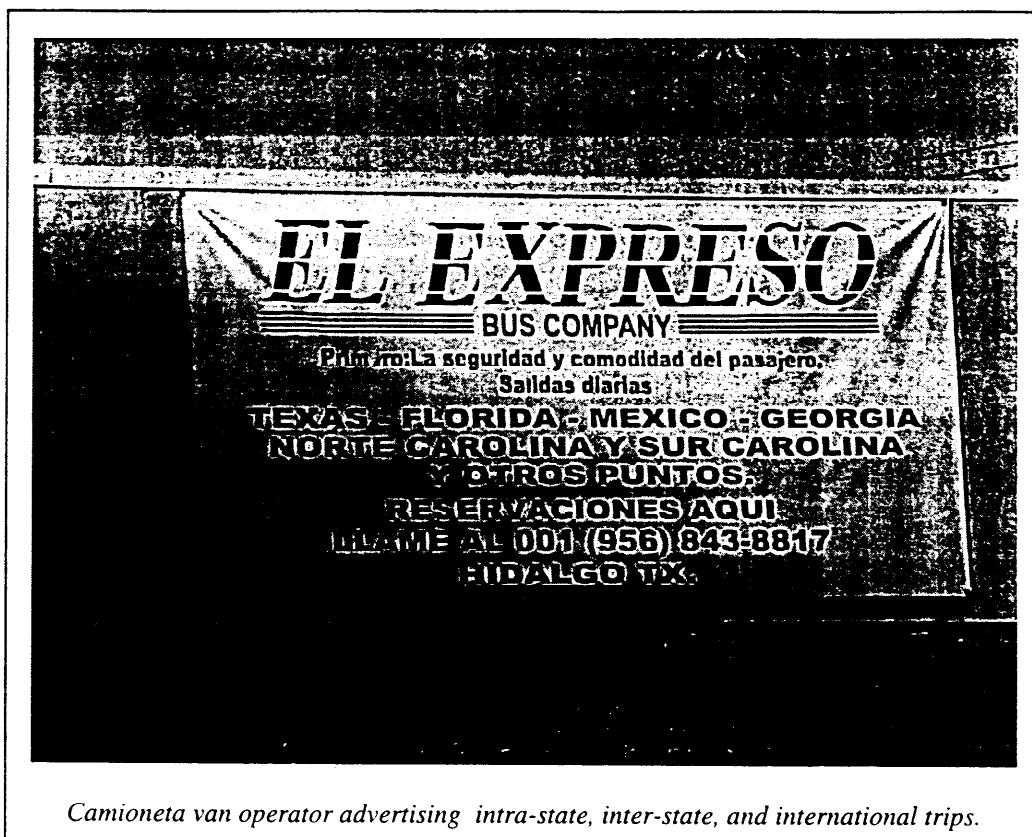


The term “suspected routes” is used in this section because the survey respondents would indicate their final destination as is reported in the survey results—no *camioneta* driver or passenger mentioned any out-of-state destinations. Out-of-state final destinations are surmised by the author based on advertised routes and rates at identifiable *camioneta* departure points and based on reports from Border Patrol agents.

Fares for service were, for the most part, uniform among van operators depending on origin and destination. The fare from the Rio Grande Valley to Houston is reported to be \$30 as is the fare from the Rio Grande Valley to San Antonio. The fare from the Lower Rio Grande Valley to Dallas is reported to be \$45. The fare from Eagle Pass or Laredo to San Antonio is \$15, while the fare to Dallas is \$30. There are no reports of Eagle Pass or Laredo to Houston fares. (See Attachment 6 for selected fare schedule.)



Camioneta van operator advertising trips to Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and Florida



Issues Identified as a Result of Other Research

Smuggling of Illegal Aliens

At least in some areas of the State, it seems clear that *camioneta* vans are a major tool in the smuggling of illegal aliens. This was particularly true in Eagle Pass where a freight rail crossing from the Mexican interior, border terrain, the amount of open space, and the temporary closure of the Highway 57 Border Patrol checkpoint all contribute to a significant level of smuggling activity.

The smuggling system apparently works such that the illegal alien boards the *camioneta* van near the border, or perhaps as many as 20+ miles inland. The boardings may occur near an international bridge crossing, in a downtown area near the border, or on a predetermined isolated rural road several miles inland.

The nature of the van operation and the expectations of the passengers allow for a significant amount of flexibility in terms of route and schedule. For the illegal alien, in smuggling operations, on most occasions the fare is not paid until the final destination is reached. There is little risk to the smuggler because he/she is operating as a for-hire carrier and is not responsible for the citizenship status of the passengers. As such, *camioneta* van operators are able to engage in an illegal operation of potentially high return with little risk of punishment if caught.

Eventually, the illegal aliens find their way further north and east. As an illustration, the New Orleans Border Patrol Sector, during an enforcement sweep in one 24-hour period in September of 1996, apprehended 250 undocumented illegal aliens mostly from *camioneta* vehicles as well as 47 pounds of marijuana. Over a 48-hour period in February of 1997, 375 illegal aliens were apprehended from *camioneta* vehicles. In March of the same year, 383 illegal aliens were apprehended from vehicles operated by what Border Patrol agents describe as known *camioneta* companies.

While these statistics are not referenced to create the impression that all *camioneta* operations are simply fronts for illegal smuggling activities, clearly, for some *camioneta* van owners, it is a potentially significant portion of their business.

Reports indicate that it may also be the case that some *camioneta* operators also participate in the smuggling of illegal drugs as well as in arranging employment in the U.S. for illegal aliens. While these topics are not the subject of this report, they may well be worthy of follow-up with Border Patrol agents by appropriate law enforcement personnel.

Recommendations

Safety Issues

Observation and survey results indicate potentially serious problems with *camioneta* van operations. First, while obviously no mechanical checks were made on the vehicles as a part of this research, it seems probable based on outside appearances and the high mileage on a significant number of vehicles, that the opportunity for major safety concerns exists. This supposition is supported by the recent study of 15-passenger van safety conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In addition, based on observation of the inside of vehicles, many times luggage was not secured, seat belts for passengers were not being worn or were not in good working order, and the stated travel plans of the drivers made for a potentially unsafe amount of time behind the wheel.

At a minimum, the same regulations with respect to motor carriers in excess of 15 passengers should be extended to carriers that operate vehicles in excess of eight passengers. There is only limited empirical safety data available to substantiate a claim that *camioneta* vans have accidents at rates higher than other commercial carriers. However, there is also absolutely no empirical data that they have accidents at rates less than other commercial motor carriers. As noted by Texas DPS Director Thomas, “There are times when the government has to be proactive instead of reactive. We have to strive to prevent loss of life while the opportunity presents itself instead of reacting to it.” It seems clear, *camioneta* vans present such a case.

FMCSRs were imposed on carriers with a capacity above 15 persons for a reason. *Camioneta* vans fulfill essentially the same mission as the for-hire motor carriers that are regulated. *Camioneta* van passengers, as well as other motorists, are deserving of the same protections. All of the requirements of Part 390 through Part 396 of the FMCSRs should be applicable to *camioneta* vans that provide for-

hire service. Adoption of these regulations would appear to go a long way to addressing such issues as driver qualifications, the operation of motor vehicles, hours of service, and inspection, repair and maintenance.

On December 9, 1999, the President of the United States signed the Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999 (MCSIA). Section 212 of the MCSIA requires the FMCSA make its safety regulations applicable to “*camionetas*.” As such, the agency was required to make such FMCSRs as driver qualifications, hours of service, inspection, repair and maintenance, etc., applicable to *camioneta* vehicles. In its deliberations, the FMCSA concluded that appropriate sections of the MCSIA would be implemented most effectively (and most closely in line with the intent of Congress regarding *camionetas*) by imposing a 75 air-mile threshold (i.e., a carrier’s route must cover at 75 mile distance as one criteria triggering applicability of the regulations).

As a result of these new regulations, once in effect, *camioneta* operators would be required to ensure that each driver meet all of the minimum qualifications for interstate commercial motor vehicle drivers. As noted in the Federal Register of January 11, 2001, “the driver disqualification provisions of 49 CFR 391.15 would also be applicable. The driving rules of part 392 would be applicable and the vehicles would be required to meet all applicable rules concerning parts and accessories necessary for safe operation covered under part 393” [Federal Register, Vol. 66, No. 8, pp. 2771].

In addition, motor carriers must comply with hours of service requirements, maintain a log book if the drivers operate beyond a 100 air-mile radius of the normal work-reporting location, and inspect each vehicle once every 12 months and document compliance with certain minimum maintenance and repair standards.

Finally, the agency proposed that *camioneta* operators be required to comply with the new regulations 90 days after the effective date of the final rule. Originally the effective date of the final rule was to be February 12, 2001. However, that has been delayed until April 13, 2001 as a result of the Regularly Review Plan announced by the President's Chief of Staff on January 20, 2001. As a result, compliance would become mandatory on or about July 13, 2001.

Advertising the Applicability of the FMCSRs

In an effort to design an education and outreach campaign to advise *camioneta* operators and drivers about the FMCSRs, the first inclination might be to send direct mail to registered operators, advertise in trade publications and through trade associations, use legal notice advertising, and other conventional methods of communication with any particular given industry or industry segment. While those traditional methods of communication should still be made in an effort to contact *camioneta* operators, it is clear based on the experience of other state and federal entities that other methods must be employed as well.

As a means of explaining the dynamic at work, a review of the "lessons learned" from another outreach and education effort in Texas/Mexico border region might be of use.

In the early 1990s the Center for Housing and Urban Development at Texas A&M University was charged by the Texas Legislature with the responsibility to help facilitate the improvement of health, education, and job training opportunities in colonia settlements on the Texas side of the Texas/Mexico border. (As an aside, colonias are impoverished rural settlements typically without water, sewer, electricity, or paved streets. There are some 1,300 colonia settlements in Texas housing over 400,000 people.) Despite the best efforts of state and county organizations and programs, participation rates in health, education, and other

social service programs that would improve conditions among colonia residents were extremely low.

After a great deal of study, the Center determined that one of the greatest needs in colonias was to develop a sense of community in order to bring citizens together to address common concerns and seek solutions. The greatest barrier to achieving this was determined to be the degree of isolation that colonia residents felt from the programs, services, and personnel that were seeking to assist them. They were not connected to the system in the same way as other residents and did not perceive the system in the same way as those traditionally served by these programs. The service delivery system that most citizens are familiar with was unfamiliar to them because they had never been a part of it.

To address these issues, the Center sought the community's input in designing and then in constructing a community center in the colonia. The purpose of the community center was to provide a place for services to be delivered in the community where the residents lived – in other words, to tear down the barriers of perceived isolation in order to better connect them to the system. In the final analysis, the Center learned that the colonia residents would not go to the service because they were uncomfortable with the environment, but would participate in the programs if the service was brought to them in an environment in which they were comfortable and had helped create. With respect to *camionetas*, perhaps the same theory might be employed to increase compliance with the FMCSRs. The regulatory system of which they will be a part is, for the most part, one with which they are not familiar and one, in many ways, they likely do not trust. Like colonia residents, there is a perceived barrier between *camioneta* operators and regulatory personnel.

In order to reach the greatest number of potential *camioneta* operators, and in addition to traditional communication means, it might be productive to employ the “colonia model” –to seek out *camioneta* operators on an almost door-to-door

basis with three objectives in mind: (1) to apprise them of the requirements of the regulations; (2) to apprise them of when a training session offering education and assistance in complying with the regulations will be available, and (3) to apprise them of when aggressive enforcement will begin. In other words, the most successful communication technique might be to design a proactive means to connect them to the system.

Finally, once the date of stated aggressive enforcement is reached, it must be implemented. Once connected to the system, the *camioneta* van operators must be confident the system will be fair and will be consistent.

Conclusions

There are three primary conclusions that can be drawn from the research associated with this report.

First, it is apparent the *camioneta* van operations provide a significant component of the intrastate and interstate transportation originating along the Texas/Mexico border. They are, by all reasonable standards for-hire carriers. The current regulations allow *camioneta* van owners to operate at a different, and lower, level in terms of safety standards than traditional motor coach operators. There seems to be no justifiable reason for for-hire motor carriers engaged in enterprises of exactly the same character and nature to be subject to substantially different safety rules based solely on the number of passengers a vehicle will carry.

Second, *camioneta* van owners, based on industry practices regarding driving hours and observed conditions of vehicles, do operate at lower safety standards than traditional motor coach operators.

Third, implementation of new regulations will likely require innovative ways of communication and education along the lines of the “colonia model” or some

similar method. It will be critical to proactively “connect” those who will be subject to the new regulations to the regulatory and enforcement system of which they will become a part.

Attachment 1



August 16, 2000

Ms. Paula Greene
Port Director, Progreso Port of Entry
U. S. Customs
Route 2, Box 600
Weslaco, Texas 78596

Dear Ms. Greene:

The Texas Transportation Institute is under contract to the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to determine the level of compliance and general awareness of *camioneta* operators along the Texas/Mexico border with applicable federal motor carrier safety regulations.

As a part of the research effort, we are required to conduct a voluntary survey of *camioneta* carriers over two days at each port of entry on the Texas/Mexico border. The survey will take approximately two minutes to administer and will cover basic topics such as the condition/age of the vehicle, vehicle markings, the type of operators license held by the driver, the route (point of origin and destination), the number of passengers, why passengers use *camioneta* carriers as opposed to other, more traditional, motor carriers, as well as other similar information.

I will be in the Weslaco area on, Monday, August 21 and Tuesday, August 22. If you have approximately 30 minutes free during that time I would appreciate an opportunity to introduce myself, explain in greater detail the research we are contracted to undertake, and how we might best accomplish our work without causing any inconvenience to the mission of the U.S. Customs Service.

I will call to follow-up on this letter, but should you so desire, I can be reached at 979-845-6165, via e-mail at d-ellis@tamu.edu, or via fax at 979-845-6008.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

David R. Ellis, Ph.D.
Associate Research Scientist

Attachment 2

Locations Where Surveys Were Conducted

U.S. Highway 77, north of Brownsville/Harlingen

U.S. Highway 281, north of Hidalgo/Pharr

State Highway 359, east of Laredo

U.S. Highway 59, northeast of Laredo

State Highway 16, south of Hebbronville

Interstate Highway 35, north of Laredo

Downtown Eagle Pass

Downtown Del Rio

U.S. Highway 54, northeast of El Paso

Attachment 3

Camioneta Survey **Location:** _____

Surveyor: _____ **Time:** _____ AM PM

Vehicle/Carrier Information:

License Plate # _____ State: _____

Motor Carrier Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Vehicle Make: _____ Model: _____ Year: _____ Mileage: _____

Seating Capacity: _____ No. of Passengers On Board: _____

Vehicle Markings: Company Name Route Name Vehicle ID # Telephone # Other

ICC # _____ RRC# _____

Other ID Markings _____

Condition of Vehicle: 1 2 3 4 5
 Excellent Poor

Remarks on vehicle condition: _____

Driver Information:

Class of Drivers License: _____

Insurance Coverage: Yes No Type of Coverage: _____

Route Origin: _____ Route Destination: _____

Intermediate Stops _____

Route Origin Time: _____ AM PM Route End Time: _____ AM PM

Fare from origin to destination? _____

No. of Accidents for this driver during prior three years? _____

Any injuries in accidents? _____

Heard of FMCS Regulations? Yes No

Ever received FMCS regulation briefing or training by company? Yes No

Ever received company policy/manual concerning FMCS regulations? Yes No

Passengers:

Why did you choose to ride this carrier? Cost Frequency of Service Route

Time of Service Only Service Available Other: _____

Attachment 4

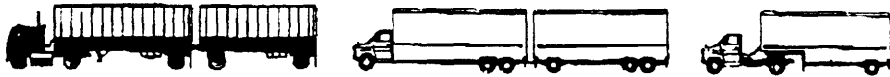
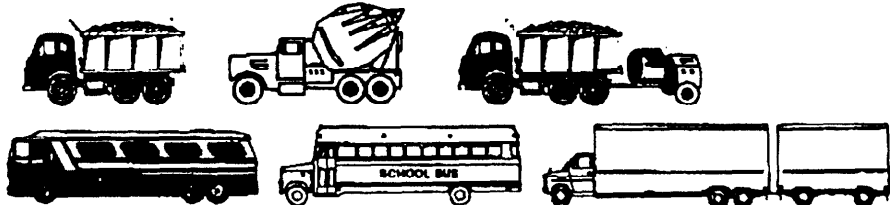
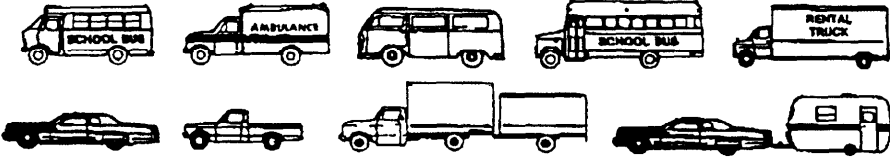

List of Surveyed *Camioneta* Operators

<u>Operator</u>	<u>Location</u>
Adame Tours	Brownsville
Avila Tours	Hidalgo
Azeta Tours	Laredo
Bravo Express	Eagle Pass
Century Van Lines	Brownsville
El Cadete	Laredo
El Expresso	Hidalgo
El Piporro Vans	Brownsville
Fiesta Vans	Hidalgo
Hidalgo Transit Service	Hidalgo
Mini Fiesta Van	Brownsville
Peoples Transportation	Hidalgo
Quick Travel	Laredo
RMC, Inc.	Laredo
Tamilupas Vans	Hidalgo
Viejas El Pariente Travel Vans	Eagle Pass
Viejas Rapido	Eagle Pass
Viejas Rigosse	Eagle Pass

Attachment 5


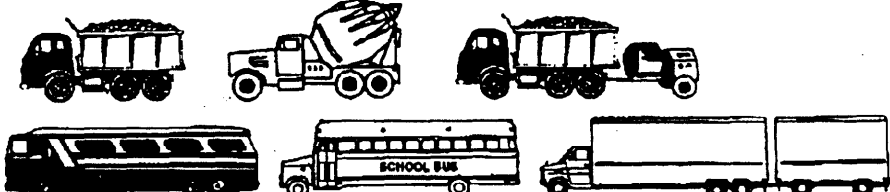
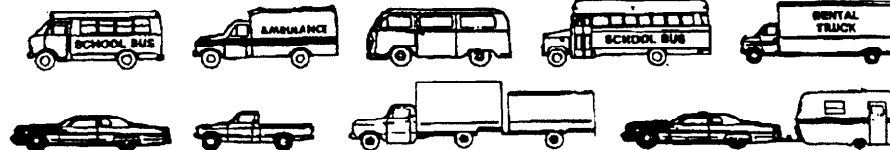

SCHEMATIC OF TEXAS CLASSIFIED LICENSING PLAN FOR CDL

CLASS

A	<p>Any combination of vehicles with a gross combination weight rating exceeding 26,000 pounds, provided the gross vehicle weight rating of the vehicle(s) being towed exceeds 10,000 pounds. Includes all vehicles in Classes B and C, but excludes motorcycles and mopeds.</p> 
B	<p>A single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating exceeding 26,000 pounds, and any such vehicle towing a vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating not exceeding 10,000 pounds or a farm trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating not exceeding 20,000 pounds, and any bus with a seating capacity of 24 passengers or more including the driver. Includes all vehicles in Class C, but excludes motorcycles and mopeds.</p> 
C	<p>Any single vehicle or combination of vehicles that is not a Class A or Class B if the vehicle is (1) designed to transport 16 to 23 passengers including the driver or (2) used in the transportation of hazardous materials that require the vehicle to be placarded under 49 CFR Part 172, Subpart F.</p> 
M	<p>Any motorcycle or moped. Persons who operate motorcycles which carry hazardous materials that require a placard must hold a Class M license in conjunction with a Class A, B, or C - CDL license.</p> 

SCHEMATIC OF TEXAS CLASSIFIED LICENSING PLAN FOR NON-CDL (Including Exempt Vehicles)

CLASS

A	<p>Any combination of vehicles with a gross combination weight rating exceeding 26,000 pounds, provided the gross vehicle weight rating of the vehicle(s) being towed exceeds 10,000 pounds. Includes all vehicles in Classes B and C, but excludes motorcycles and mopeds.</p> 
B	<p>A single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating exceeding 26,000 pounds, and any such vehicle towing a vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating not exceeding 10,000 pounds or a farm trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating not exceeding 20,000 pounds, and any bus with a seating capacity of 24 passengers or more including the driver. Includes all vehicles in Class C, but excludes motorcycles and mopeds.</p> 
C	<p>Any single vehicle or combination of vehicles that is not a Class A or B, a single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating of less than 26,001 pounds towing a farm trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating that does not exceed 20,000 pounds, and a vehicle designed to transport 23 or less passengers including the driver. (Vehicles rated as 16-23 passengers including the driver require a Class C CDL unless exempt.)</p> 
M	<p>Any motorcycle or moped.</p> 

Attachment 6

Selected Travel Routes and Fares

Trip Origin	Trip Destination	Intermediate Stop	Fare
Laredo	Dallas	San Antonio	\$30
Laredo	San Antonio	Dilley	\$15
Hidalgo	Dallas		\$45
Brownsville	Houston	Refugio	\$30
Hidalgo	Dallas	San Antonio	\$45
Hidalgo	Houston	Refugio	\$30
Brownsville	Houston	Refugio	\$30
Laredo	San Antonio	Dilley	\$15
Laredo	Dallas	San Antonio	\$30
Laredo	San Antonio		\$15
Roma	Dallas		\$40